

Chapter 3

ARRANGING AND DESCRIBING COLLECTIONS

I. INTRODUCTION¹

This chapter focuses on the arrangement and description of archival collections. Arrangement is the physical and intellectual process of organizing the documents that belong to a collection and description is the literary act² of recording information about the organization and content of a collection. In archival jargon, these activities are often joined together and simply referred to as “processing.”

With the possible exception of some institutional records, few, if any collections, will ever come into your repository ready to be placed on the shelf and made immediately available to researchers. In the main, the materials that you accession will be a mess: dirty, dusty, disorganized, full of damaging materials, and housed in inappropriate containers. The processes, techniques, and standards employed by archivists as they arrange and describe collections enable a repository to gain control over its materials so that they can better ensure the physical preservation of a collection as well as provide researchers with a reasonable, but not perfect, degree of access to material relevant to their research.

The accessioning process that we discussed at the end of our last chapter should be understood as the most fundamental and preliminary level of archival arrangement and description (i.e., processing). By maintaining the physical integrity of a collection and carefully recording some preliminary descriptive information, the accessioning archivist has ensured a very basic level of control over and access to a newly acquired collection. In fact, depending on the natural pressures of time, limited resources and staff as well as the uncertain nature of demand for a particular collection, the rudimentary level of control generated by accessioning may suffice. But in those instances when this minimal level of processing is clearly inadequate, you will wish to do more.

¹ This chapter is heavily based on text, exercises and outlines created by Katherine Wissner and Linda Sellars.

² A sample Finding Aid and Catalogue Record are appended to this chapter in Appendix 3A and 3B. If you are unfamiliar with either of these types of archival description, it may be very useful to briefly review them before reading the remainder of this chapter.

II. ARCHIVAL ARRANGEMENT

The arrangement or organization of a collection is more of an art than a science. Every collection is different in terms of its composition and importance and every repository develops its own conventions and practices for arrangement. Having said this, there are a small number of principles and conventions that have been recognized by archivists as having universal applicability. The chief guiding principles of arrangement are *Provenance* and Original Order.

***Provenance* or What is an Archival Collection?**

Let us begin our discussion of the principle of *Provenance* by stepping back and asking a seemingly basic question: What is an archival collection? In simplest terms, an archival collection is a defined set or group of historical records that are maintained and described together. The reason that historical records are grouped together is that any given historic record is made more meaningful by being maintained within a particular documentary context. An obvious example might be a WWII-era letter from your grandfather to your grandmother. By itself the letter and its contents would make some sense, but by being grouped with other examples of their correspondence as well as your grandfather's military papers, the letter will assume a much higher or richer level of informational significance.

The "particular documentary context" that makes an historic record most *meaningful* is chosen by the archivist when he or she decides upon the characteristic trait or attribute that links individual historic records into a collection. Archivists have come to prefer collections of historic materials that are "naturally" or "organically" linked together by their creator. In fact, the principle of *Provenance* states that the records generated by a person or organization should remain together. The strong, indeed almost unconscious, predisposition on the part of archivist for linking historical records through their creator underscores the high degree of acceptance that the principle of *Provenance* has had in the archival world. Thus, returning to our example above, your grandfather and grandmothers papers should probably be maintained as one collection, rather than having the materials apportioned into a collection of WWII letters or Military Papers. Collections that adhere to the principle of *Provenance* are sometimes referred to as "organic collections."

In those instances, when the archivist does decide that an historic record is made most *meaningful* or *useful* by a documentary context other than the one mandated by the principle of *Provenance*, he or she has created an Artificial Collection. Perhaps you are a local history librarian and your library does not maintain or collect many complete collections. Instead, your brief is to create and maintain subject files about the people, places, and events that occur in your town or county. These vertical files will be heterogeneous with respect to the type and source of the documents that they contain. By

organizing your files according to subject matter, you have chosen to create an “artificial collection” that is organized around a trait or attribute that you have deemed to be more important and useful than that of *Provenance*.

In most instances, the decision to create an artificial collection stems from an overriding interest in the informational content contained in the documents. However, it is important to recognize that groups of documents can also tell stories that transcend their mere content. To preserve these other stories, archivists have developed the principle of Original Order.

Original Order

The principal of Original Order, which is often referred to as *Respects des Fonds*, states that historical records should be maintained to preserve the manner in which they were originally used, kept, or experienced by their creator. This principle underscores the idea that a document plays multiple roles. In addition to being a simple “container” of information, it is a tool used by people to accomplish certain goals and tasks as well as an artifact or evidence of their actions or experiences. Moreover, since activities, goals, and experiences are complex and often involve the manipulation or use of a number of documents in conjunction with one another, by preserving the original user’s arrangement scheme, an archivist preserves the documentary connections or order that the initial users found to be most useful or meaningful. Thus, in an imperfect way, Original Order acts to maintain and preserve evidence of the original user’s work practices and experiences.

The principle of Original Order was initially created in an effort to capture the bureaucratic practices and administrative routines of the large governmental and business institutions that emerged out of the 19th century. And it is still true that Original Order is most commonly encountered by archivists who work with organizational or institutional papers, for the documents created and selected for preservation by businesses and other large institutions end up in an archives as the logical end to an ordered and regularized documentary life-cycle. While this is not often the case for personal papers, it would be foolish to placidly assume that Original Order is never relevant when dealing with personal papers. Returning to the World War II-era letters example above, perhaps your grandmother kept everything that she received from your grandfather and the War Department in the order that she received them, rather than according to date that they were written. By keeping them in the order she imposed, rather than reorganizing them into chronological order, you will have preserved her experiences as a reader on the home front without altering a researcher’s ability to retrace your grandfather’s experiences as both a writer and a soldier.

In general, the presence or absence of Original Order is fairly easy to discern. A collection that resembles the contents of a series of emptied junk drawers is unlikely to harbor any meaningful remnants of their creator’s work habits whereas a collection consisting of a neatly labeled series of folders is likely to reflect some work habits and intentions. In either case, it is important to note in your archival description when

Original Order has been retained and when an arrangement schema has been imposed by the processing archivist. If this information is not noted in your description of the collection, you may inadvertently mislead your researchers.

A final word of caution may be in order. There are collections that are hybrids of documentary chaos and Original Order; and as an archivist you must pay close attention as you process a collection to ensure that that you do not assume away Original Order. Documents vary in importance to their creators and the absence of a coherent order in one section should not be read as the absolute absence of Original Order within a collection.

The Practice of Arrangement

The successful arrangement of a collection is a very physical task that requires a good deal of forethought and planning. After having reviewed the paperwork generated by the accessioning archivist, your initial step as the processing archivist is to survey the collection. Pencil and paper in hand, you should review the entire collection in order to get a more detailed sense of its contents in terms of its informational content, original arrangement schemas, formats, and preservation needs. Using all of this information, you should develop an arrangement plan that:

- Takes into account all of the materials contained within the collection;
- Observes the Principle of *Provenance*;
- Preserves any vestiges of Original Order;
- Or in the absence of Original Order, organizes the materials by function or type;
- And finally, your plan should order the collection in a rational, measured, and accessible manner.

Once you have settled upon a scheme of arrangement, your next task is to organize all of the collection's materials in a manner that reflects the physical order that you have decided upon in your plan.

Levels of Arrangement and the Virtues of Chronological and Alphabetical Ordering

The final bullet point in the section above states that you should strive to arrange your collection into an order that is "rational, measured and accessible." To ensure that this is in fact the case, you should constantly ask yourself whether the arrangement decisions that you are making are helping to present the collection in as clear a way as possible. Conversely, is the order that you have devised obscuring the contents of the collection?

In the effort to make a collection's contents as accessible to researchers as possible, archivists often divide documents into "Levels of Arrangement" or groupings that are described together because they share a common attribute, such as their material form,

informational content, function, or order of arrangement. Depending upon the relationships that exist between these groupings, they can be variously labeled as a Series or Subseries.

A Series is generally understood to be a discrete grouping that is a peer of the other Series divisions that exist in a collection. For instance, an archivist might decide to divide a collection into three Series that have been labeled as “Correspondence,” “Writings,” and “Subject Files.” Each of these divisions or documentary groupings acts in the same way that a chapter functions as it divides a book. That is, each serves as a container for materials united by a common significant attribute.

A Subseries is used by archivists when they want to emphasize that there are meaningful divisions within the materials that they have grouped together as a Series. A good example of a Subseries might well occur within our hypothetical Series, “Writings,” which could quite logically be divided into a number of Subseries by genre-type (e.g., Novels, Short Stories, Poetry, Essays, or Articles).

The decision to create a Series or a Subseries should not be taken lightly. Carefully chosen divisions can be used to great effect, but the over-division of a collection can obscure its structure by presenting the researcher with a fractured collection, riven by too many distinctions.

The individual documents that are contained within a Collection, Series, or Subseries are housed within file units (e.g. folders, boxes, etc). These file units should be ordered in a manner that makes sense to the researcher and that is practical for the processing archivist to accomplish. The two most common organizing schemas are to chronologically or alphabetically arrange the file units. Returning to our Series example, the processing archivist could have chosen to order the Correspondence Series chronologically and the Writings and Subject Files alphabetically. In either instance, a researcher would almost instinctively grasp the nature of arrangement.

After you have arranged the materials into file units and nested the files in the order dictated by your plan, you should number and label your folders. Folder numbering should be sequential with no repetitions. This will make it easier for your repository to ensure that collections stay intact.

An example of the information that you should record on a folder label for the hypothetical Alfred Braxton Foushee Papers is as follows:

Collection Title-----	Series -----	File Unit Title-----	Folder Number
Foushee Papers	Correspondence	1964-1968	1
Foushee Papers	Correspondence	1969-1973	2
Foushee Papers	Writings	Articles	12
Foushee Papers	Writings	Monographs	13

Finally, please note that archivists are not compelled to use Series or Subseries to segment a collection. It is perfectly acceptable to arrange a collection into file units without resorting to the use of a Series and Subseries.

Remember: You should only use the divisions that you deem to be useful! Thus, the Foushee Papers could be divided in one of several fashions depending upon your good judgment. Below are several different ways that the Foushee Papers could be arranged employing various levels of arrangement. When you review these sample plans, please assume that the folders listed are select items and that they do not represent the totality of the imagined Papers

Various Arrangement Plans	
Alfred Braxton Foushee Papers	
<u>A. Collection Level of Arrangement Schema</u>	
Folder 1	Correspondence, 1964-1968
Folder 2	Correspondence, 1969-1973 <i>[More Correspondence Folders]</i>
Folder 27	Writings: Articles
Folder 28	Writings: Monographs <i>[More Writings Folders]</i>
Folder 50	Subject Files: Clay-Glaze <i>[More Subject Files Folders]</i>
Folder 76	Subject Files: Oxendine Pottery, Inc.
<u>B. Series Level of Arrangement Schema</u>	
Series 1. Correspondence	
Folder 1	1964-1968
Folder 2	1969-1973 <i>[More Correspondence Folders]</i>
Series 2. Writings	
Folder 27	Articles
Folder 28	Monographs <i>[More Writings Folders]</i>
Series 3. Subject Files	
Folder 50	Clay-Glaze <i>[More Subject Files Folders]</i>
Folder 76	Oxendine Pottery, Inc.
<u>C. Subseries Level of Arrangement Schema</u>	
Series 1. Correspondence	
Folder 1	1964-1968
Folder 2	1969-1973 <i>[More Correspondence Folders]</i>
Series 2. Writings	
SubSeries 2.1 Articles	
Folder 27	A-C (By Title) <i>[More Writings Folders]</i>
SubSeries 2.4 Reviews	
Folder 35	F-G (By Author of Reviewed Work) <i>[More Writings Folders]</i>
Series 3. Subject Files	
Folder 50	Clay-Glaze <i>[More Subject Files Folders]</i>
Folder 76	Oxendine Pottery, Inc.

Preservation and Processing³

With few exceptions (e.g., reprocessing, microfilming, or digitization), the archival processing or arranging phase that is being discussed in this chapter is the period during which a collection is most intensively examined by your institution's staff. It is also the period during which the collection will be subject to its most intensive and comprehensive preservation review with accompanying preservation actions.

Typical and frequently necessary preservation actions include⁴:

- **Segregating archival materials:** Not every item in a collection will be an 8½ x 11 piece of paper. Different formats have different preservation and enclosure needs to ensure their long-term stability.
- **Removing damaging fasteners and other problematic materials:** Newly accessioned documents often contain a variety of incidental materials that if left in place will continue to damage your collections. Common objects that are typical candidates for removal are: metal fasteners, rubber bands, acidic paper, organic materials.
- **Reformatting unstable archival materials:** Some fragile materials, especially those with little artifactual value such as newspaper clippings, need to be reformatted to ensure their survival.
- **Re-housing archival materials in appropriate enclosures:** To protect loose documents, they should be removed from their native enclosures (i.e., old boxes, envelopes, etc.) and housed in appropriate enclosures such as a folder, envelope, plastic/polyester sleeve, or box. These primary enclosures are then nested in a larger secondary enclosure or container, such as a document case, record center box, or even a stationary map case.

³ Preservation is addressed very briefly in this chapter. The next chapter, "Safekeeping Your Collections" discusses the issues raised here in greater depth.

⁴ The National Archives Records Administration collectively refers to these actions as "Holdings Maintenance." The Library of Congress provides a detailed description of the component activities that comprise "Holdings Maintenance" in "Preservation of Archival Records: Holdings Maintenance at the National Archives" at <http://www.archives.gov/preservation/holdings-maintenance/table-of-contents.html>.

Arrangement Exercise

You have received material from Harry Clinton Williams of Williamsville, N.C. Williams is 68 years old and a lifetime resident of Williamsville. He has recently retired after having sold the men's clothing store he owned and operated for nearly thirty years. Williams is a town leader who has been active in his church and other civic organizations. He is married to Natalie Jean Thompson Williams and has two adult children who live out of state.

A cursory review of the materials reveals the following:

1. Two banana cartons full of letters and greeting cards still in envelopes. Most envelopes are addressed to Williams or his wife, Natalie Jean Williams. Also in these boxes are manila envelopes containing bank statements, credit card bills, cancelled checks, and Williams's federal and state income tax returns, 1965-2003.
2. An Absolut Vodka box containing three bound volumes: one of minutes of congregational meetings, 1905-1956, of First Baptist Church in Williamsville, one volume of membership records, 1923-1988, of First Baptist Church, and a volume of essays on religious subjects. Also in this box are minutes of meetings, reports, and financial records relating to organizations in which Williams was active: Rotary materials in red folders, Toastmasters materials in yellow folders, and Masonic materials in blue folders.
3. A Staples box with family photographs, identified and unidentified; newspaper clippings, some about Williams or members of his family and some with no apparent connection to him; three small envelopes, each containing a lock of hair; a large brown envelope containing report cards, diplomas, school papers of Williams and of his children; and one reel of Super8 film with home movies and one VHS tape of an interview with Williams for a local TV show.

Given this scenario and reasoned assumptions, answer the following questions. If you need additional information to make your decisions, list the questions you would like to ask.

1. How will you organize the papers?
2. What series will you establish?
3. Are there items that you will not keep?

II. ARCHIVAL DESCRIPTION

Archival Description naturally follows Archival Arrangement. After having sorted, arranged, and examined the many documents that comprise a collection, the processing archivist will have become that particular collection's expert. This is a fact that comes with some distinct problems, the chief one being that the archivist must now organize his or her detailed knowledge of the collection into a logical, clear, and concise documentary format that allows researchers to accomplish two essential tasks:

- To determine whether a collection is likely to harbor documents relevant to their research project; and
- To locate these pertinent materials.

Thus, archival description functions as both an abstract and an index to a collection.

As with arrangement, the level of detail and effort that an archivist should employ when crafting the description of a collection is extremely variable and depends on the needs and value of the collection as well as available resources. Increasing, because of the finite limits of resources that are available to archivists, it has been widely accepted that some description, even a cursory description based on a very minimal amount of arrangement, is better than no description at all. Rest assured that a more detailed level of description can always be created later when time, resources, and priorities permit.

A Brief Caveat

Archival description is not historical analysis. Your goal is to accurately present a collection's contents as briefly and succinctly as possible. You should focus on describing the subject matter, people, events, locations, document types, and their arrangement. Your goal is to provide access to researchers; the researchers will do the analysis.

Forms of Archival Description: Finding Aids and Catalogue Records

Creating an Archival Finding Aid (a narrative description of a collection) and/or an Archival Card Catalogue (an old fashioned card file) is a process of distilling the universe of information that you have learned about a collection into an established pattern of discrete packets of information. These packets of information or elements of description are combined differently, with a Finding Aid containing substantially more information than a Catalogue Record. In this trickle down model, it should be understood that the information that appears in a card catalogue has "passed through" the finding aid; it is simply the case that not all the information passes through. The following chart lists the chief informational or descriptive elements that are used in archival description and indicates the presence or absence of an element in each of the two forms.

Descriptive Element	Catalogue Record	Finding Aid
Title	X	X
Unique Identifier	X	X
Extent	X	X
Bio/Hist Note		X
Content, Scope Note	X	X
Index Terms		X
Administrative Info.	Some	X
Container List		X

Despite the variable quantity of information presented, the goal of each form of description is to provide the researcher with the information necessary to determine a collection's relevance to their research. This is accomplished through the careful and consistent presentation of information. It cannot be stressed enough that the hallmark of good archival description is consistency. As a repository you should strive to develop in-house practices and conventions that will not vary from collection to collection or from archivist to archivist. One tool that is invaluable in this regard is a recent Society of American Archivists publication, "Describing Archives: A Content Standard." This work covers in depth the elements that will be discussed below. Moreover this work provides multiple examples of each of the elements and could serve your repository as a "style-guide."⁵

Major Elements of Archival Description

Name of a Collection's Creator(s)

The first element of description that must be decided upon is the name of the collection's creator. In this element, it must be understood that the "creator" is the person, family, or corporate entity that was primarily responsible for gathering together the various documents that comprise an archival collection. The creator of a collection is **not** necessarily the same individual, group, or institution that actually created the documents.

For instance, returning to the World War II-era letters example above, your grandfather and the War Department created the documents that your grandmother received, ordered, and kept. Despite the fact that she did not create any of the documents in this collection, your grandmother did create the collection and should be singled out in your description as its "Creator."

⁵ Describing Archives: A Content Standard (SAA, 2004) is available for purchase on-line at <http://www.archivists.org/catalog/pubDetail.asp?objectID=1279>

Exercise
Name of Collection Creator Element

It isn't always easy deciding upon a collection's creator. Review the brief descriptions below and assign each a creator.

- 1. 16 diaries, three volumes of poetry, and four plays written by Alison Douglas.**
- 2. Corporate Records 1925-1965 of the Alexander Smith Thumbscrews Company which took over the Shannon Foundry in 1930, the Chase Foundry in 1940, and the Pennypacker Advertising Company in 1953.**
- 3. Letters from Sally Cross to her sister Allyn Cross regarding farming life in Clay County in the 1860s; Sally Cross diary for 1855; daguerreotypes of various members of the Cross family, circa 1870-1875; school essays of Joshua Cross, 1850-1852; Joshua Cross Civil War diary, 1862-1864; Allyn Cross's marriage and baptismal certificates; deeds and financial papers for land owned by Alphonso Banister, husband of Allyn Cross; and the Banister Family Bible.**

Title and Unique Identifier

Archival Collections do not come with a neatly supplied title. As with the creator element above, on the basis of his or her knowledge of a collection, an archivist must create a title that is unique, descriptive, and precise. Its function, as with monographic titles, is to act as a unique identifier. Additionally, it should convey information about the creator of the collection as well as the collection's content.

The formula for devising an archival title is: [Creator's Name] + [Description of the Materials] + [Date Range of Materials]. Returning to our World War II Letters collection, a possible title would be: the **Veronica Curran World War II Letters, 1942-1945**. Thus, the title directly provides the researcher with specific information about the collection's content and the time frame of its creation.

In a sense, this particular example is a bit anomalous. For while it is perfectly acceptable and quite helpful to place a very specific descriptor [e.g., Diaries, Photographs, Civil War Letters, Field Journals, Maps, etc.] in an archival title, this degree of specificity should only be employed when you are describing a collection that is singular in its subject and format focus.

Most collections are less focused and more diffuse in the materials that they contain. For the construction of titles for heterogeneous collections archivists use the following descriptive conventions:

Common Descriptors Used in Archival Titles

Papers—Used to describe archival collections that were created by an Individual or a Family.

- Alison Douglas Papers, 1810-1830
- Harry Clinton Williams Papers, 1905-2003
- Cross Family Papers, 1850-1875

Records—Used to describe archival collections that were created by an institution, public or private.

- Oxendine Pottery, Inc. Records, 1945-1980
- Azalea Taxonomy Laboratory Records, 1940-2000
- Alexander Smith Thumbscrews Company Records, 1925-1965

Collection—Used to describe collections that were assembled from various sources by an active and purposeful collector or creator.

- [Your name here] Civil War Letter Collection, 1862-1865
- Charles Eliot Goodspeed Autograph Collection, 1200-1982

As was mentioned above, a title uniquely identifies a collection, but for database, index, and other paperwork purposes, titles are clunky, long, and prone to errors of transposition. Although it is seen by some as an unneeded redundancy, we recommend that each collection be assigned a unique numerical or alphanumeric identifier. “MC” (Manuscript Collection) followed by a number that is sequential in nature (i.e., first collection is MC1) is a quick and easy method of generating a locally unique identifier.

Physical Description: Extent and Genre Types

Specific information about the extent or size of a collection serves both internal and external purposes. Typically, repositories measure and track their holdings using several metrics: linear or cubic feet are a measure of the shelving space occupied by a collection; the total number of containers provides a gross system of inventory control; and an estimated item or document count conveys the composition of a collection. Please note that your repository must be consistent in its use of units of measurement; decide upon the metrics that will be most useful and make sure that your staff consistently and correctly applies them.

Administratively, this data is obviously useful as a repository manages the physical needs of its collections. Perhaps less obviously, this information can be of crucial importance to a researcher. Knowing whether a collection consists of 1 letter or 1,000 letters can be helpful to a researcher as he or she is planning a summer of research trips. Quite frankly, some research trips will not be worth the effort or expense and a little information up front will lessen the chance of disappointment and financial loss.

Similarly, specific information detailing the types of formats or genres (e.g., diaries, letters, day books, photographs, audiotapes, etc.) present in a collection, allows the researcher to prioritize the value of a collection. Although seemingly relevant, for a researcher whose sole focus is World War II photographs, the Veronica Curran World War II Letter Collection, 1942-1945, would be as useless as a collection of Civil War Diaries.

Historical or Biographical Note

An historical or biographical note is a descriptive device that archivists use to provide basic factual information about the individuals, groups, and institutions that created the collection and its contents. This information naturally varies in depth, but it represents an attempt on the part of the archivist to explain the context in which the documents were created and used. As with the bulk of the information used to craft your archival description, most of the information will be derived from your review of the collection itself.

Below is the Biographical Note for our World War II Letter Collection. This note focuses on the writer of the letters, rather than the collector, and because Mr. Curran was not an unusually prominent person, all of the information presented about him was culled from the letters he wrote home to his wife.

Biographical Note

Robert Henry “Jack” Curran of Lake Norman, NC, was a traveling salesman in the Southeastern United States. He was drafted into the United States Army in December 1942 and served as an enlisted man in the Army Infantry during World War II until his discharge in the late fall of 1945. For most of his enlistment, Curran was a noncommissioned officer who served as a platoon sergeant. He served with several units within the US 2nd Infantry Divisions in England, France and Germany. He was captured by the Germans in the Ardennes Forest during the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944. After his capture he was transported to a Prisoner of War Camp, Stalag 9B, in Bad Orb Hessen-Nassau, Prussia. In May 1945 he was liberated by Soviet troops and repatriated.

Collection Scope and Content Information

Unlike a Biographical or Historical Note, the Collection Scope and Content Information Note focuses on the materials contained in the collection rather than their direct creator. In this section an archivist will present a description of the formats and subject matter (e.g., people, organizations, events, time periods, etc.) that are present or documented in a collection. This section is also used to single out exceptional documents or information,

unexpected findings, or even a collection's lack of usefulness in an expected area (e.g., a doctor's diary that never mentions the practice of medicine, etc.). Below is a Scope and Content Note for our World War II Letter Collection.

Scope and Content Note

This collection is chiefly letters written by Robert Henry "Jack" Curran of Lake Norman, N.C., to his wife, Veronica Curran (Vera). Prior to World War II, Curran was a traveling salesman in the Southeastern United States, and it was his habit to write his wife on an almost daily basis. Curran continued this routine throughout the war. The near-daily frequency of his letters presents a detailed portrait of the concerns, fears, and activities of an infantry platoon sergeant leading men in combat and in captivity. Formats contained include letters, telegrams, postcards, and V-mail.

Throughout these letters, Curran wrote of his concerns for his platoon as they trained for and participated in combat operations. There are detailed explanations of many United States Army practices including small unit combat tactics, censorship and military secrecy, post-war demobilization, and promotions. Curran's letters also contain detailed descriptions of worries and fears that he had made errors of judgment. This is particularly true in the 120 letters that Curran wrote after his capture. These letters also contain detailed descriptions of his life as a prisoner, including his journey under armed guard through France and Germany into Prussia, prison camp regulations, Red Cross inspections, prison guards, and his liberation and journey back to the United States.

Letters written prior to June 1944 frequently address the financial needs and concerns of his wife and family back home in Lake Norman, N.C. Also included are a few miscellaneous items, including: pay stubs, military identity cards, Red Cross documents, and a post-war health inspection report.

Access Points or Index Terms

Access Points or Index Terms are the carefully chosen words and phrases that archivists and librarians use to link topically similar collections. This is accomplished through the consistent use of a "controlled vocabulary." A "controlled vocabulary" is essentially a bounded or limited set of phrases that are used every time an archivist wants to draw a researcher's attention to the presence of a particular subject matter, format-type, geographical term, person, group, or institution that is contained in a collection.⁶ It is

⁶ There is often no need to invent a new "controlled vocabulary" for your collections. The Library of Congress, the National Library of Medicine, and others have worked hard to create large lists of useful descriptive terms. NC ECHO maintains a webpage of links to various Controlled Vocabularies that you can and should use at <http://www.ncecho.org/ncdc/ncdublinkcore.htm#subject>. In addition to consulting lists of controlled vocabularies, it can also be instructive and useful to search repository and library online

important to stress that a repository must use the same vocabulary when it describes all of its collections. Ideally, a repository will also use standardized and widely adopted sets of index terms so that a researcher will be able to place your repository's collections within the broader range of described collections that are available.

Returning to our ongoing example, perhaps Veronica Curran, the donator of the World War II Letters, is also the church secretary and music director of the Lake Norman Second Baptist Church. Your processing archivist has noted that she appears very prominently in a newly acquired collection, the Lake Norman Second Baptist Church Records, and he would like to mention her in the descriptive section devoted to access terms. Given the foregoing, the controlled vocabulary phrase for Mrs. Curran should always be "Curran, Veronica, 1918-." Similarly, Lake Norman should always be rendered as "Lake Norman (N.C.) and any collection documenting the activities of a traveling salesman or a soldier's letters home should respectively include "Traveling sales personnel—United States." and "Soldiers—United States—Correspondence—History—World War, 1939-1945." A list of controlled access terms for the WWII Letters follows:

Controlled Access Terms	
Curran, Robert Henry "Jack," 1915-1962.	
Curran, Veronica, 1918-.	
Lake Norman (N.C.)	
Prisoners of war—Germany.	
Soldiers—United States—Correspondence—History—World War, 1939-1945.	
Soldiers—United States—Family relationships.	
Traveling sales personnel—United States.	
United States. Army. 2 nd Infantry Division.	
United States. Army—Military life.	
World War, 1939-1945—Personal narratives, American.	
World War, 1939-1945—Prisoners and prisons.	

The utility of these terms may seem a bit mystifying, but a simple paper or Microsoft Word Document index scheme that relates all the access terms in your collections with their relevant collection numbers would immeasurably aid your staff and researchers as they work to find materials about specific topics. An example of an index relating controlled access terms and the collection that they describe is below.

Curran, Veronica, 1918-	MC267, MC356
Lake Norman, (N.C.)	MC12, MC267, MC356, MC451
Prisoners of war-Germany	MC2, MC199, MC267

catalogues for Index Terms. If you are going to do this, be consistent in your borrowings and try to borrow from a repository that contains collections likely to mirror your own.

Traveling sales personnel-United States	MC267, MC561
World War II, 1939-1945	MC199, MC267, MC342

Administrative Information

Administrative Information is a broad rubric that contains information about a collection's restrictions, acquisition history, and alternative forms.

It is prudent to inform patrons of any restrictions that could govern (from their point of view, hinder) their research use of a collection. Typically, this means that you should explicitly state that your collection may be protected under U.S. Copyright Law and it is incumbent on the researcher to secure the requisite permissions. Additionally, your description should state any direct use restrictions that could affect a researcher's ability to view or use the collection or any of its parts. This could include details about restricted materials, the need to secure written permission from a donor, the need to make listening copies, a prohibition against copying, the lack of computer equipment or software to open a specific file, etc. You should include enough information to prevent any ugly surprises for the researcher.

Acquisition information legitimizes your holdings and informs the public about how a collection came into your possession. This information is often referred to as "Provenance" in the art history-sense of the word. Generally, this information is brief: "Received from Veronica Curran of Mooresville, N.C., in January 1997."

If a collection has been microfilmed, published in facsimile form, digitized, or made available in any other more portable and accessible form, this fact should be noted in a collection's description. This information could make it much easier for a researcher to make use of your materials.

Container List

A container list details the arrangement of a collection by briefly listing the type and date range of materials contained within each of the housings (e.g., boxes or folders) used to protect and store a collection. It is literally a list of the materials within all the containers.

A Container List is extremely useful in helping researchers request those discrete sections of a collection that are germane to their research. In the absence of a container list, a patron would have to request and review large sections, if not an entire collection, to find relevant materials. If you refer to the Finding Aid for the Veronica Curran World War II Letters that is fully presented below, you will see a folder list that would allow a researcher to meaningfully and rather easily select and request items of use. For example, a researcher studying Traveling Salesmen during the early phase of the war could limit his request to folders 8 to 11. These folders contain letters that Curran wrote as a traveling salesman between the attack on Pearl Harbor and his induction into the military in November 1942.

Finding Aid and Catalogue Record Exercise

Review the Veronica Curran World War II Letters, 1939-1945 Finding Aid and Catalogue Record that follow this page and answer the following questions:

- Where did the records come from?
- Why were they created?
- How do they relate to other records?
- Why are they significant?
- How does the information contained in the Catalogue Record and the Finding Aid differ?

APPENDIX 3A

Finding Aid

Veronica Curran World War II Letters

Repository:	Lake Norman Historical Society 2762 South Pine Boulevard Mooresville, NC 28115
Title:	Veronica Curran World War II Letters, 1939-1945
Creator:	Curran, Veronica, 1918-
Collection No.:	MC 267
Extent:	About 1,500 items (1.5 linear feet)
Restrictions:	No Access Restrictions
Provenance:	Received from Veronica Curran of Mooresville, N.C., in January 1997.
Copyright Notice:	Copyright is retained by the authors of items in these papers, or their descendants, as stipulated by United States copyright law.

Abstract

Robert Henry “Jack” Curran of Lake Norman, NC, was drafted into the United States Army in December 1942. For most of his enlistment, he served as a platoon sergeant within the US 2nd Infantry Divisions. He was captured by the Germans in the Ardennes Forest at the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944. Toward the end of the war, he was liberated by Soviet Troops and repatriated. This collection is chiefly letters written by Curran to his wife, Veronica Curran, first as a traveling salesman and then as a soldier in World War II. Curran was a devoted letter writer and wrote home almost daily about his experience as a soldier.

Biographical Note

Robert Henry “Jack” Curran of Lake Norman, NC, was a traveling salesman in the Southeastern United States. He was drafted into the United States Army in December 1942 and served as an enlisted man in the Army Infantry during World War II until his discharge in the late fall of 1945. For most of his enlistment, Curran was a noncommissioned officer who served as a platoon sergeant. He served with several units within the US 2nd Infantry Divisions in England, France and Germany. He was captured by the Germans in the Ardennes Forest during the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944.

After his capture he was transported to a Prisoner of War Camp, Stalag 9B, in Bad Orb Hessen-Nassau, Prussia. In May 1945 he was liberated by Soviet troops and repatriated.

Chronology

December 1942	Induction into the United States Army at Fort Joseph, Ky.
January-March 1943	Basic Training at Fort Bragg in Fayetteville, NC
April-June 1943	Infantry Training at Fort Bragg, NC
July-December 1943	Assigned as corporal, then sergeant, for the Headquarters Company, 2 nd Infantry Division, Durham, England
January-June 1944	Platoon Sergeant, in Kilo Company of the 1 st Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, 2 nd Infantry Division, England and France
June 6, 1944	Participated in Normandy Invasion [D-Day]
July-December 1944	Participated in Combat Operations in Northern France and Belgium
December 22, 1944	Captured in the Ardennes Forest during the Battle of the Bulge
December 1944-January 1945	Transported east into Germany
December 28, 1944	Reported "Killed in Action" by the War Department
January 27, 1945	Interned at Stalag 9B, Bad Orb in Hessen-Nassau, Prussia
January 31, 1945	War Department revised "Killed in Action" report to "Missing in Action," presumed prisoner of war.
May 4, 1945	Stalag 9B is liberated by Soviet forces.
June 12, 1945	Repatriated.

Scope and Content Note

This collection is chiefly letters written by Robert Henry "Jack" Curran of Lake Norman, N.C., to his wife, Veronica Curran (Vera). Prior to World War II, Curran was a traveling salesman in the Southeastern United States, and it was his habit to write his wife on an almost daily basis. Curran continued this routine throughout the war. The near-daily frequency of his letters presents a detailed portrait of the concerns, fears, and activities of an infantry platoon sergeant leading men in combat and in captivity. Formats contained include letters, telegrams, postcards, and V-mail.

Throughout these letters, Curran wrote of his concerns for his platoon as they trained for and participated in combat operations. There are detailed explanations of many United States Army practices including small unit combat tactics, censorship and military secrecy, post-war demobilization, and promotions. Curran's letters also contain detailed descriptions of worries and fears that he had made errors of judgment. This is particularly true in the 120 letters that Curran wrote after his capture. These letters also

contain detailed descriptions of his life as a prisoner, including his journey under armed guard through France and Germany into Prussia, prison camp regulations, Red Cross inspections, prison guards, and his liberation and journey back to the United States.

Letters written prior to June 1944 frequently address the financial needs and concerns of his wife and family back home in Lake Norman, N.C. Also included are a few miscellaneous items, including: pay stubs, military identity cards, Red Cross documents, and a post-war health inspection report.

Arrangement of Collection

This collection is arranged into three separate correspondence series based on the original order created by Veronica Curran. She kept the letters in the order that she read them and had divided the letters into groupings based on her husband's status: Civilian Letters, Military Letters, and Prisoner of War Letters. Please note that she received the majority of the Prisoner of War letters in 1962, upon her husband's death. Apparently, he had been unable to mail them during his internment and left instructions to read them in his will.

Controlled Access Terms

Curran, Robert Henry "Jack," 1915-1962.

Curran, Veronica, 1918-.

Lake Norman (N.C.)

Prisoners of war—Germany.

Soldiers—United States--Correspondence--History--World War, 1939-1945.

Soldiers—United States--Family relationships.

Traveling sales personnel—United States.

United States. Army. 2nd Infantry Division.

United States. Army—Military life.

World War, 1939-1945—Personal narratives, American.

World War, 1939-1945—Prisoners and prisons.

Container List

I. Civilian Letters, 1939-1942

About 200 items

Original Order

This Series is comprised of letters written by Robert Henry "Jack" Curran of Lake Norman, N.C., to his wife, Veronica Curran (Vera). Prior to being drafted in November of 1942, Curran was a traveling salesman in the Southeastern United States, and it was his habit to write his wife on an almost daily basis. Letters address the financial needs and concerns of his wife and family back home in Lake Norman, N.C., the difficulties and joys of traveling throughout the Southeastern United States, and the effect of the war on his job as a salesman.

Folder 1	January-March 1939
Folder 2	April-June 1939
Folder 3	July-September 1939
Folder 4	October 1939-February 1940
Folder 5	March-September 1940
Folder 6	October-December 1940
Folder 7	January-April 1941
Folder 8	May-December 1941
Folder 9	January-March 1942
Folder 10	April-September 1942
Folder 11	October 1942

II. Military Letters, 1942-1944
 About 1,200 items
 Original Order

This Series begins in November 1942 with Curran's induction and is comprised of near-daily letters that present a detailed portrait of the concerns, fears, and activities of an infantry platoon sergeant leading men in combat and in captivity. Formats contained include letters, telegrams, postcards, and V-mail.

Throughout these letters, Curran wrote of his concerns for his platoon as they trained for and participated in combat operations. There are detailed explanations of many United States Army practices including small unit combat tactics, censorship and military secrecy, post-war demobilization, and promotions. Curran's letters also contain detailed descriptions of worries and fears that he had made errors of judgment.

Also contained in this series are telegrams from the War Department notifying Mrs. Curran of her husband's death in December 1944 and the subsequent notification that he was being held as a prisoner of war. This Series ends in December 1944 with Curran's capture by German forces.

Folder 12	November 1942
Folder 13	December 1942-January 1943
Folder 14	February-April 1943
Folder 15	May 1943-June 1943
Folder 16	July-August 1943
Folder 17	September-October 1943
Folder 18	November-December 1943
Folder 19	January 1944
Folder 20	February 1944
Folder 21	March 1944
Folder 22	April 1944
Folder 23	May 1944

Folder 24	June 1944
Folder 25	July 1944
Folder 26	August 1944
Folder 27	September 1944
Folder 28	October 1944
Folder 29	November 1944
Folder 30	December 1944

III. Prisoner of War Letters, 1944-1945, 1962
 About 150 items
 Original Order

This Series begins in December 1942 when Curran was captured by German forces in the Ardennes Forest during the Battle of the Bulge. Curran's letters contain detailed descriptions of worries and fears that he had made grave errors of judgment. These letters also contain detailed descriptions of his life as a prisoner, including his journey under armed guard through France and Germany into Prussia, prison camp regulations, Red Cross inspections, prison guards, and his liberation and journey back to the United States in August 1945.

Please note that these Prisoner of War letters were discovered in 1962, upon Curran's death. His will contained instructions for his wife to read these letters which had never been posted. The will which is contained in Folder 31 begins the series.

Folder 31	1962
Folder 32	December 1944
Folder 33	January 1945
Folder 34	February 1945
Folder 35	March 1945
Folder 36	April 1945
Folder 37	May 1945
Folder 38	June-August 1945
Folder 39	September 1945

APPENDIX 3B

Catalog Record

MC 267 Curran, Veronica, 1918-.
Veronica Curran World War II Letters,
1939-1945, 1962
1,500 Items, 1.5 linear feet.
Unrestricted.

This collection is chiefly letters written by Robert Henry "Jack" Curran of Lake Norman, N.C., to his wife, Veronica Curran (Vera). Prior to World War II, Curran was a traveling salesman in the Southeastern United States, and it was his habit to write his wife on an almost daily basis. Curran continued this routine throughout the war. The near-daily frequency of his letters presents a detailed portrait of the concerns, fears, and activities of an infantry platoon sergeant leading men in combat and in captivity. Formats contained include letters, telegrams, postcards, and V-mail.